DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 345 CS 214 469

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TITLE The Relationship of Student Ratings, Faculty Status and Student Writing Performance.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (75th, New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjunct Faculty; Comparative Analysis; *Full Time Faculty; Higher Education; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Writing Achievement; *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research

ABSTRACT

A study examined the difference in writing competency achievement between classes taught by full-time faculty and classes taught by adjunct faculty, and whether student ratings of the course and the quality of instruction differed. Subjects were 1,339 students in all 49 classes taught by 11 full-time and 23 adjuncts in the Fall semesters of 1991 and 1992 at an urban, liberal arts undergraduate institution serving an ethnically diverse student population. Data included students' scores on a writing assessment test (a passing score is required for successful completion of the course) and responses to a questionnaire on teaching effectiveness. Results for both years indicated no statistically significant difference in the writing achievement, mean course grades, mean course grades for the next-level English course, and student faculty ratings between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty. Results also indicated that for 1991 (but not for the 1992 sample), adjunct faculty assigned a greater proportion of higher grades (As and Bs) than their full-time colleagues. Findings do not support the assumption that adjunct instruction is categorically an inferior means of delivery instruction. (Contains 25 references, seven tables of data and two notes.) (RS)

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The Relationship of Student Ratings, Faculty Status and Student Writing Performance

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A paper Presented at the
American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
New Orleans, Louisiana
April, 1994

CS214469

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Increased reliance on the use of part-time faculty for instruction raises many important questions for the conduct of higher education enterprise. Today, nation-wide, adjuncts or part-time faculty constitute 40% of the number of all faculty in higher education. The proportion of part-timers among all teaching faculty exceeds 50% in community and junior colleges, and in some regions of the country. Reasons stated for employing part-time faculty for delivery of instructional services are: cost factors, uncertainty about student enrollment, and the opportunity to offer experimental or innovative programs requiring specialized expertise (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1991; Reed and Grusin, 1989; Spinetta, 1990; Galbraith and Shedd, 1990; Smith, 1990). However, critics of the practice charge that the overuse of adjuncts is incompatible with many basic tenets of higher education (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1989, 1991).

As contractual workers, part-time faculty are not required to maintain office hours or participate in non-instructional functions such as attending departmental meetings or serving on the college committees. As a result, they may not have a strong sense of commitment to the goals of the institution and by and large, their contact with students is limited to class time.

Samuel (1989) argues the division of college staff into full-time and adjunct not only is unfair to full-time faculty who are obliged to carry out the non-instructional duties of the adjuncts, but also it results in differential student treatment. The author asserts, "Since office hours are required for full-time faculty and are not required for adjunct faculty, the teaching services provided for students who pay the same tuition are differentiated and unequal." (pp. 42-43). Furthermore, in light of the studies that show the frequency and quality of faculty-student contact is important in student retention (Tinto, 1993; Stoecker, Pascarella and Wolfle, 1988; Pascarella and Tarenzini, 1991), the prevalence of overreliance on adjunct faculty among colleges serving non-

traditional and minority students seems contrary to the basic philosophy of these institutions.

The literature on part-time faculty, mostly descriptive or anecdotal, focuses primarily on the positive and negative (mostly negative) aspects of the practice of employing part-time faculty (Arden, 1989; Robert, 1990; Nist, 1990; Farrell, 1992). There have been very few empirical studies comparing students' learning outcomes or perceptions of the teaching effectiveness in courses taught by full-time professors versus courses taught by adjuncts. Zahn and Schramm (1992) compared students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness in courses taught by tenure-track and non-tenure-track teachers. The results indicated that overall, students rated tenure-track teachers significantly higher than academic staff teachers. However, the results of students' evaluations analyzed by faculty employment status and course skill level showed a different picture: Non-tenure-track teachers' ratings increased dramatically for skill courses, resulting in similar ratings for both groups of faculty. Davis, et al. (1986) compared students' performance in English classes taught by full-time and part-time faculty. The results showed no difference in the two groups' achievement in the next level English course. However, in its Statement of Principles and Standards for Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, The Conference on College Composition and Communication asserted the excessive reliance on part-time faculty is eroding the quality of writing instruction (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference in writing competency achievement between classes taught by full-time faculty and classes taught by adjunct faculty. Also the study explored whether student ratings of the course and the quality of instruction differed significantly in classes taught by the two groups of instructors.

The institution where the study was conducted is an urban, liberal arts, undergraduate institution, serving an ethnically diverse student population. Located in one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the country, the College serves primarily non-traditional students. Fewer than sixty percent of the student body speak English as their primary language. The majority of students are first generation college students from low income families. The mission of the College is to prepare these non-traditional students for the expectation of the twenty-first century work force. Among other requisite skills, mastery of written communications is of primary concern. Due to recent budget cuts and personnel reduction related to retrenchment and retirement initiatives, adjuncts constitute more than 50% of the total instructional force, and they are responsible for greater proportion of instruction for lower division students. As part of an institution-wide effort to increase student retention[1], there is a broad-based interest in examining the teaching effectiveness of adjunct faculty.

Null hypothesis 1: There will be no statistically significant difference in the Writing Assessment Test performance between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

Null hypothesis 2: There will be no statistically significant difference in the mean course grades between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

Null hypothesis 3: There will be no statistically significant difference between the distribution of course grades between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

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[1] In the past two years a number of initiatives have been put in place to support student retention, to include but not exclusive to the establishment of an Enrollment Management Committee, the development of a Freshman Year Experience Program, the establishment of a Center for Student Leadership Development and intersession and summer skills immersion programs.

Null hypothesis 4: There will be no statistically significant difference in the mean course grades in the next level English course between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

Null hypothesis 5: There will be no statistically significant difference between student ratings of full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

All day and evening English 115 classes taught in the Fall Semesters of 1991 and 1992 were selected for inclusion in the study. The data for the study were taken from the transcripts or responses of a total of 1,339 students in 49 classes taught by 34 faculty (11 full-time and 23 adjuncts). Table 1 provides a summary of the data for each year in the study.

Table 1

SUMMARY OF DATA FOR EACH YEAR

	Student Performance		Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness	
	Fall 1991	Fall 1992	Fall 1991	Fall 1992
Full-time	10	5	10	5
Adjuncts	10	18	8	18
Sections	23	26	21	26
Students	597	742	373	529

Instrumentation

Writing Assessment Test:

Students' scores on the Writing Assessment Test (WAT) were used to measure learning outcomes. As part of a broader testing program in basic skills, WAT has been administered to the incoming class at each of the seventeen undergraduate colleges in the system since 1978. Students are required to pass all three skill tests (also includes tests in reading and mathematics) prior to their junior year. The WAT is a fifty-minute essay test that requires students to respond to either of two prompts, which call for persuasive expository writing. The WAT essays are scored by English faculty at each campus and scored holistically based on standards set by the Evaluation Scale, a six-point scale in which 6 is the highest rating. Each essay is read by at least two trained readers, with each reader unaware of the score the other reader has assigned. Scores of 1 to 3 from individual readers are considered failing scores while a score of 4 or better indicates that the essay meets the standard for minimum competency in writing. The sum of scores by readers constitutes the total score. Total scores may range from 2 to 12, with a total score of 8 denoting the essay meets the minimum system-wide writing competency standard. In situations where the two readers disagree on whether or not an essay should pass or fail, a third reader resolves the disagreement. The sum of the two scores that agree on the pass-or-fail marking will constitute the total score. The writing audits have consistently demonstrated a high rate of at least 80% pass-or-fail agreement between the colleges and the audit (The Writing Assessment Test Audit Results 1982-1992, 1993).

At the College where the study was conducted, a passing score on the WAT is required for the successful completion of English 115. In addition to the course grade, students' transcripts show the WAT score assigned by each reader and the resulting pass-or-fail mark (P/F) on the test.

Student Reaction to Teaching Effectiveness:

Student Reaction to Teaching Effectiveness is a 30-item questionnaire which has been in use at the College for the past 15 years. The responses for the first 29 items of the evaluation questionnaire are measured on a five-point scale, 5 denoting the highest score and 1 denoting the lowest score. In addition the NA response option indicates the question is not applicable to the course. The last item (#30) of the questionnaire invites the respondents to comment further on the course and/or effectiveness of the instruction on the back of the questionnaire. For the purposes of this study, only the responses to Item 11 were used. Table 2 presents a listing of the evaluation instrument questions.

Table 2

Student Reaction to Teaching Effectiveness Questionnaire

1.	Has good command of the subject
2.	Present a good overview of the subject
3.	Raises challenging questions and/or issues
4.	Makes course objectives clear
5.	Is well prepared
6.	Is well organized
7.	Explains the material clearly
8.	Is an effective lecturer
9.	Anticipates questions which might arise
10.	Is aware of whether the class is following the discussions
11.	Independent of the course, I would want to have the instructor again
12.	Independent of the instructor, I recommend the course
13.	Is willing to explain
14.	Provides ample opportunity for discussion
15.	Encourages student participation
16.	I feel free to ask questions
17.	I feel free to disagree and express ideas
18.	The instructor holds my attention
19.	Makes helpful comments in class and/or on papers and/or on tests
20.	Encourages students to seek help
21.	Available for consultation
22.	Evaluates carefully
23.	I found the course worthwhile
24.	This course increased my appreciation of the subject
25.	The assignments were worthwhile
26.	The readings were helpful
27.	The examinations were fair
28.	The test questions were thoughtfully formulated
29.	There is a sufficient basis for grading
30.	You are invited to comment further on the course and/or effectiveness of the instruction on the back of the questionnaire

Statistical Analysis

Two methods were employed to compare the writing competency of the two groups of students. First, students' writing competency at the completion of English 115 was measured by their pass-or-fail scores on the WAT.[2] Second, students' performance in the next level English course was used as another measure of writing achievement. Chi square analyses were employed to examine the distribution of pass-or-fail marks and course grades between the students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty. For each year in the study, two *t*-tests were used to determine if there was a difference between the mean course grades of the two student groups in English 115 and English 125, the next level English course.

The analysis of student ratings of the quality of teaching was based on data collected through administration of Student Reaction to Teaching Effectiveness. A total of 902 usable student responses evaluating 33 faculty (11 full-time and 22 adjuncts) were used for the analysis. To compare student ratings of full-time and adjunct faculty, a *t*-test was conducted using each instructor's average score on Item 11 which is the overall item for the rating of the teaching effectiveness, independent of the course. (See Table 2.)

FINDINGS

Null hypothesis 1: There will be no statistically significant difference in the Writing Assessment Test performance between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

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[2] Preliminary data analysis showed students entered English 115 through different paths: a) by successful completion of a lower level developmental course (English 100) or b) by obtaining a minimum total score of 6 on their initial WAT. Only the latter group of students (those who entered the course with a total WAT score of 6) was selected for inclusion in this study.

The results of the chi square analyses indicated the difference in the pass-or-fail rate between students taught by full-time and adjunct instructors was statistically non-significant (P > .05). As Table 3 indicates, while in 1991 the proportion of students passing the WAT was higher among the students taught by full-time faculty, the trend was reversed in 1992 - a higher proportion of students taught by adjuncts achieved a passing score on the WAT.

Table 3

FACULTY STATUS AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON THE WAT

	Fall 1991			Fall 1992		
Faculty	Fail	Pass	Total	Fail	Pass	Total
Adjunct	14	93	107	36	190	226
	(12.5)	(94.5)		(38.3)	(187.7)	
Full-time	13	111	124	18	75	93
	(14.5)	(109.5)		(15.7)	(77.3)	
Column Total	27	204	231	54	265	319
	X^2=0.38; *df*=1; P > 0.05			X^2=0.55; *df*=1; P > 0.05		

Note: Expected Value (in Parentheses)

Null hypothesis 2: There will be no statistically significant difference in the mean course grades between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

Two *t*-tests analyses were used to explore the difference between the mean course grades of the two groups of students. The results yielded statistically non-significant *t* values for both, 1991 and 1992 (P > .05). Table 4 summarizes the results for both years under the study.

Table 4

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS MEAN COURSE GRADES IN ENGLISH 115

	Fall 1991		Fall 1992	
	Student taught by		Student taught by	
	Adjunct	Full-time	Adjunct	Full-time
N	107	124	226	93
$\bar{X}$	2.43	2.05	2.14	2.00
sd	1.13	1.10	1.26	1.27
se	0.11	0.10	0.08	0.13
df	229		317	
t-value	2.59		0.88	

Non-significant, Probability > 0.05

Null hypothesis 3: There will be no statistically significant difference between the distribution of course grades between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

Chi square analyses were employed to compare distribution of course grades between classes taught by full-time and adjunct faculty for each year in the study. The resulting X^2 was statistically significant for the 1991 data ($P < .05$), indicating that in 1991, adjunct faculty assigned a greater proportion of higher grades (As and Bs) than their full-time colleagues. Table 5 summarizes the results for 1991 and 1992.

Table 5

COMPARISON OF GRADES ASSIGNED BY FULL-TIME & ADJUNCT FACULTY

	Fall 1991			Fall 1992		
	Grades assigned by			Grades assigned by		
	Adjunct	Full-time	Total	Adjunct	Full-time	Total
A	12	7	19	26	8	34
	(8.8)	(10.2)		(24.1)	(9.9)	
B	51	37	88	74	28	102
	(40.8)	(47.2)		(72.3)	(29.7)	
C	29	55	84	74	35	109
	(38.9)	(45.1)		(77.2)	(31.8)	
D	1	5	6	9	0	9
	(2.8)	(3.2)		(6.4)	(2.6)	
F	14	20	34	43	22	65
	(15.7)	(18.3)		(46.1)	(18.9)	
Total	107	124	231	226	93	319
	X^2=14.14; *df*=4; P < 0.05			X^2=5.52; *df*=4; P > 0.05		

Note: Expected Value (in Parentheses)

Null hypothesis 4: There will be no statistically significant difference in the mean course grades in the next level English course between students taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

To respond to this research question, students who completed English 125, the next level English course, were selected for further study. Two *t*-tests were employed to examine the mean course grades between students who were taught by full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between the groups' mean course grades in the next level English course. Table 6 depicts the *t*-test results for 1991 and 1992.

Table 6

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS MEAN COURSE GRADES IN ENGLISH 125

	Fall 1991		Fall 1992	
	Student taught by		Student taught by	
	Adjunct	Full-time	Adjunct	Full-time
N	55	89	93	56
$\bar{X}$	2.47	2.09	2.26	2.43
sd	1.22	1.21	1.16	0.87
se	0.16	0.13	0.12	0.12
df	142		147	
t-value	1.84		-0.95	

Non-significant, Probability > 0.05

Null hypothesis 5: There will be no statistically significant difference between student ratings of full-time and adjunct faculty in English 115.

The *t*-tests comparing the two faculty groups on Item 11 indicated no statistically significant differences (P > .05) between the two groups. Table 7 depicts the summary of the results for 1991 and 1992, respectively.

Table 7

COMPARISON OF FULL-TIME AND ADJUNCT FACULTY
ON STUDENT RATINGS (ITEM 11)

	Fall 1991		Fall 1992	
	Adjunct	Full-time	Adjunct	Full-time
N	8	10	18	5
$\bar{X}$	4.29	3.72	3.89	4.14
sd	0.61	0.85	0.56	0.68
se	0.22	0.27	0.13	0.30
df	16.00		21.00	
t-value	1.61		-0.83	

Non-significant, Probability > 0.05

CONCLUSIONS

The initiative for this exploratory study was prompted by an institution-wide concern about student retention. As stated previously, there is a body of literature that claims the practice of hiring adjuncts is incompatible with the goals of higher education and will adversely impact the quality of instruction. This study sought to determine if full-time and adjunct faculty could be distinguished by their grading practices, students' learning outcomes as measured by a system-wide test of writing skills, and student ratings of the teaching effectiveness. The results failed to reject four of the five null hypotheses for the 1991 study. Hypothesis 3 was rejected for the 1991 study, indicating that adjunct faculty assigned a greater proportion of higher grades (As and Bs) than their full-time colleagues. The results failed to reject all five null hypotheses for the 1992

study. Overall, the findings of the study do not support the assumptions that adjunct instruction is categorically an inferior means of delivery of instruction (Samuel, 1989; Chronicle of Higher Education, 1989, 1991).

Many issues affecting the quality of part-time (or full-time) instruction are institution-specific and must be evaluated in the context of institutional characteristics. Therefore, the results of this study are limited to urban institutions with student population with similar characteristics.

In light of the current fiscal climate and the findings presented in this paper, the authors recommend that the issue of adjunct hiring and retention continue to be examined. The trend of the nineties appears to be increased reliance on the use of adjunct faculty. If, as the findings suggest, adjunct instruction does not have a negative impact on student learning outcomes and student perception of teaching effectiveness, and if, as studies cited indicate, there is a need to have increased faculty-student involvement as a means to increase retention rates, then institutions must be called upon to support adjunct faculty development. Support for adjunct faculty can mean, according to the needs and resources available to institutions, creating a congenial environment (i.e., office space, secretarial support, access to technological support and equipment) or supporting professional development activities (i.e., participation in professional meetings, graduate school tuition), or negotiating work contracts that encourage longevity by providing job security for adjunct faculty (i.e., one-fourth- or one-half- line appointments which would also provide equivalent sick leave, sabbatical leave and/or retirement income).

As Ernest Boyer indicates in his 1990 monograph, Campus Life: In Search of Community, institutions of higher learning in the nineties must endeavor to create caring, learning communities

which, we add, must extend themselves to support and develop the potential of the part-time workforce; individuals whose presence until now has been treated as marginal but who are in fact the backbone of many colleges and universities today.

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